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ABSTRACT

A pilot study examined the effect of a read-aloud literature program on the attitudes of middle school students toward reading. A randomly selected group of 70 teachers and 1,673 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students from four regions of the United States and one region in Europe participated. Testing the hypothesis that student attitudes toward reading would be positively affected if teachers were to share (model) their own love and enthusiasm for books, the teachers read adolescent literature classics to students for 15 minutes, 4 days a week, for 12 weeks. Analysis of pre- and post-tests, Form 1 and Form 2 of the "Reaction Toward Reading Attitude" scale, indicated little or no difference in student attitude was generated. Further analysis suggested that too little time had elapsed between pre and post assessments. This pilot study developed baseline data and a working research team for the continuation of a three year project funded by the International Reading Association designed to increase instructional effectiveness for students during the critical "last chance" (before dropping out of school) adolescent years. (Three tables of data are included, and 26 references and a sample reading reaction scale are attached.) (NH)

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Project A.R.I.S.E.

Reading Attitude Pilot Study

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Abstract

A randomly selected group of 70 teachers read adolescent literature classics to a sample of 1,673 sixth, seventh and eighth grade students for 15 minutes four days a week for 12 weeks. An analysis of pre and posttest attitude inventory data converted to Reading Reaction Index scores showed no significant differences in student attitudes toward reading. Analysis of standard deviations for RRI mean scores showed that responses were tightly grouped and highly consistent across all regions. A t-test revealed that in every region the average for girls was significantly (p .05) higher than that of boys. However, both groups reported what can be considered a positive attitude toward reading.

Project A.R.I.S.E.

Reading Attitude Pilot Study

Introduction and Background

Students should read, but don't

A Nation at Risk (1983) focused national attention on the problems of the American educational system. Becoming a Nation of Readers (1984) was the first major report to directly address the improvement of instruction. Of the 17 recommendations made in this report, five related to the quality and quantity of actual reading done by students. More specifically, this report recommended that children should spend more time in independent reading. "Whether in or out of school independent reading is associated with gains in reading achievement. By the time they are in third or fourth grade, children should read independently a minimum of two hours per week. Children's reading should include classic and modern works of fiction and nonfiction that represent the core of our cultural heritage" (p. 119). But a substantial number of children, regardless of age, do not choose to read either for information or for pleasure (Morrow, 1982; Greaney, 1980; Book Industry Study, 1984).

Books engender no positive affect

From a study of thousands of students, Bloom (1987) concluded

that "whatever the cause, our students have lost the practice of and the taste for reading. They have not learned how to read, nor do they have the expectation of delight or improvement from reading... The notion of books as companions is foreign to them... There is no printed word to which they look for counsel, inspiration or joy" (p. 62).

Effects of affect are not studied

Both Matthews (1985) and Athey (1985) have pointed out that aside from passing notice, affective factors receive little elaboration or explication in the growing body of cognitively oriented, reading process research. Athey has insisted that a more careful analysis of affective factors is warranted since cognitive-linguistic variables could account for no more than 78 percent of the variance in reading comprehension and 56 percent of the variance in reading speed among young adult readers (Holmes, 1976, p. 195). In an earlier study Singer (1965) found that approximately 30 percent of the variance in comprehension among elementary school subjects was unexplained by cognitive-linguistic variables. In view of these discrepancies, Athey (1985) has suggested that "learning may be inadequate for motivational reasons and instruction may be inappropriate because it fails to appeal to the values and interests of the learner" (pp. 527-28).

Methods and materials are turning kids off

Over three decades ago Lecky (1951) attributed lack of interest in reading, particularly among boys, to the content of basal-reader-driven reading instruction in this country. Summarizing Lecky's explanation of one possible cause of reading disabilities among boys, Athey (1985) reasoned that "it may be plausible to conclude that reading material that is inconsistent with the perceived self is likely to be rejected and that rejection may well generalize to the whole of reading, especially when the child's experiences with reading is of necessity limited" (p. 534). Studies conducted by Furth (1970), Rohwer (1971) and Sawyer (1987) also questioned the ability of the lock-step instructional methods and limited content of basal reader driven instruction to either adequately teach mature reading skills or produce avid readers. The National Advisory Council on Adult Education (1987) also concurred. They accuse "readabilitized" reading materials for contributing to the production of students unable to cope with more difficult materials and without much enthusiasm for reading anything" (p. 49).

Attitude and motivation to read go hand in hand

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) indicated that "there is widespread agreement that affect is the most essential part of the attitude

concept" (p. 11). Coffer and Appley (1964) concluded from an extensive review of the literature that "it is largely an assertion of faith that it is useful to conceive of attitudes as motivational variables" (p. 805). Likewise, Newcomb and Converse (1965) defined attitude as a state of readiness for motive arousal. Mathewson (1985) combined these observations and concluded that "if children are to read [and achieve in school] they will need not only a favorable attitude toward reading, but also an appropriate motivation" (p. 842).

Achievement-motivation was viewed by early theorists (McClelland, 1961; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark & Lowel, 1953) as a relatively enduring personality trait attributable to differences in child rearing practices (Rosen & d'Andrade, 1959; Winterbottom, 1958). Subsequently, achievement motives were linked to expectations and experiences of success or failure (Atkinson, 1964) and cognitively controlled reactions to experiences (Weiner, 1979). These later theories viewed attitudes as malleable and capable of formation and change.

Attitudes can be changed

Attitudes vary from person to person. With regard to reading Downing and Leong (1982) cited the advantage enjoyed by students who have identified reading as a "universal good" because of the

greater probability of their deciding to read any given book at any time as opposed to those students who have neutral or negative attitudes toward reading (p. 260). In the case of the neutral or negative attitude student the decision to read may be dependent upon the identification of a particular need or motive (Mathewson, 1985). Mathewson (1985) concluded that affective variables can be identified and used as a basis for either elimination of avoidance behavior or strengthening of approach behaviors related to reading. He suggested positive association, reward, persuasion and modeling as possible ways to change students' attitudes toward reading. Modeling (in this case, seeing an admired person reading, reading to, or reading with the student) has been extensively studied and recommended as a highly effective way to bring about change in behavior (Gagne, 1977; Thornburg, 1971; Bandura, 1965).

Rationale and Purpose

It was reasoned that students who don't read, might develop interests in reading if they were given an opportunity to "see the treasures" that lie hidden within the covers of well written books. Since many students at the middle school level either can't or won't read and understand more complex literature, why not read some of these books to them. In this way, students could be introduced to the joy of reading and their store of knowledge

essential to cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1987) would continue to grow.

Incidents of teachers reading aloud to students beyond the elementary grades are rare (Tingley, 1986). However, in a survey conducted by Brucherhoff (1977), high school students most often cited being read aloud to as the most important thing teachers did to promote their competence and interest in reading. Interest, enthusiasm, enhanced vocabulary and higher-level thinking skills are benefits to be derived from read-aloud and listening/ discussion activities in the middle grades (Hickman, 1986 and Frick 1986).

Purpose

This study examined the effect of a read-aloud literature program on the attitudes of middle school students toward reading. Modeling (reading to students) was the technique selected for this pilot study. It was hypothesized that student attitudes toward reading (particularly among the neutral and negative) would be positively affected if teachers were to share, with their students, their own love and enthusiasm for books. It was further hypothesized that students' neutral or negative attitudes toward reading would be positively affected if teachers read worthwhile literature and discussed the contents of these classics with their

students on a regular basis in the classroom.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 1,673 6th, 7th and 8th grade students selected from four regions of the United States and one region in Europe. Regional Directors, selected and trained by Dr. Jo Stanchfield, solicited a pool of volunteer 6th, 7th and 8th grade teachers in their regions. Volunteers were categcrized by grade level and the SES of their students. A minimum of 10 but no more than 20 teachers were then randomly selected from the pool categories until as close as possible to a balance of grade levels and SES levels was achieved. Approximately (not all submitted necessary pre and post data) 70 teachers selected one intact class period of students to participate in the pilot study.

Procedures

An experimental group pretest-posttest design was used. The "Reaction Toward Reading Attitude Scale" (Stanchfield, 1986) was field tested concurrently. In early January of 1986 the five regional directors met with their teachers. The scope and purpose of the larger project A.R.I.S.E. were reviewed. It was reiterated that Project A.R.I.S.E. (Adolescent Reading Increases Student Effectiveness) was to be a planned three and one-half year action

research study sponsored by the Sex Differences in Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association. The first half year of the project (Appreciative Listening) was to be a pilot study to gather baseline data and field test the "Reaction Toward Reading Attitude" scale. Specialized training for teachers was to precede each of the following three full years emphasizing: 1st year, appreciative and attentive listening; 2nd year, analytical listening; 3rd year, critical and creative listening with structured writing responses. Objectives for the first half year included 1) to stimulate student interest in literature, 2) to expand knowledge and background of literary materials, 3) to improve attitudes toward reading. Materials: Teachers were given a set of children's classics (22 titles) selected from a list compiled by a committee of educators. Jim Trelease's Read Aloud Handbook (1985) was included in each box as a professional resource.

In early February 1986 students were given the "Reaction Toward Reading Attitude" scale (Stanchfield, 1986). Their responses were recorded using a Likert-type five point scale: strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree. Teachers then began to read for a period of 15 minutes, four or five days a week to their class (grade six, self contained) or to

the one class selected to participate in this study (grades six, seven and eight departmentalized). Students were engaged in appreciative listening while the teacher read; and teachers and students participated in active discussion of the material read and enjoyed their experiences of listening and talking about good literature. In June 1986 students completed Form 2 of the "Reaction Toward Reading Attitude" scale. Teacher and student comments about the experience were also given to the regional directors, along with scantron response sheets containing the pre- and posttest responses from each student.

Results

During July 1986 the data were processed and preliminary reports were generated. After close examination of the data, it became apparent that little or no difference in student attitude towards reading was generated between the pre and posttest assessments. Further analysis resulted in concluding that simply too little time had elapsed between pre and post assessments. Furthermore, in the opening months of the 1985-86 school year, the students had already experienced reading instruction under a wide variety of conditions that could preclude any meaningful comparison. It was decided to limit the final report to the June assessment data. This would still provide an excellent baseline

for subsequent study, and provide a means for comparison within as well as across regions.

Since the main objective of the study was to assess student attitudes towards reading, a scale had to be developed to quantify the variable under study. To meet this need a factor called the Reading Reaction Index (RRI) was developed. The RRI is a measure of a student's attitude towards reading. The higher the number, the more positive the response to the item.

The RRI was computed based on a weighted scale for responses to the statements on the Stanchfield survey. The RRI was computed by first assigning a value to each point on the response scale (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Not Sure = 3, Disagree = 2 and Strongly Disagree = 1) and then computing an average response based on these weights. Since items 5, 7, 10, 11, 12 and 17 were negative towards reading, a correction was necessary when computing the respective RRI's. A reverse weighting scheme (Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Not Sure = 3, Disagree = 4, and Strongly Disagree = 5) was employed for these items. An RRI has a range of one (1) to five (5) with (5) indicating an extremely positive attitude towards reading. One (1) would indicate an extremely negative attitude, and a three (3) a neutral attitude towards reading. The average RRI is reported for each item as well as a composite for

the 20 items.

Tables 1, 2 and 3 are based on student responses to the 20 items that comprise the Reaction Toward Reading Attitude Scale. It should be noted that the apparent contradiction in numbers between Girls, Boys and Total is due to some students not filling in the demographic information properly. Only those forms that had properly completed demographic data were included in the subgroup analysis. All forms submitted from a region were included in the Total, regardless of the quality of the demographic data.

Findings

Table 1 shows the distribution of girls and boys surveyed in this study. A total of 1,673 students were surveyed across four regions of the United States and a selected region in Europe.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 2 shows the average RRI for the various regions and the subgroups. The standard deviation was also included to give the reader a sense of how tightly the sample was distributed. A t-test was computed to determine if the differences in the means between the boys and girls were significant. In every case, the average for the girls was significantly (p .05) higher than that

of the boys. Both groups, however, responded with what can be considered a positive attitude towards reading.

Insert Table 2 about here

A rank order of the RRI for the total sample provided some insights about where the positive attitudes seem to manifest themselves. The item that received the highest RRI was question #3, "I feel good when I'm reading what interests me." The second highest question was #20, "I feel that my reading skills help me in every day life."

Insert Table 3 about here

Southeast Region Analysis

The small n in the southeast was due to a delay in gaining access to 7th and 8th grade classes. Traditional junior high programs, under the pressures of state and county accountability testing, had no time to fit reading of children's literature into the English class curriculum. Ten (10) 6th grade self-contained classes were used during the pilot study in the southeast. Seventh and 8th grade classes were added when access to the middle

school population was achieved. The overall average RRI for the Southeast was quite comparable to the average RRI for all other regions. This was also true for the average RRI for girls and boys when compared to girls and boys in all other regions. The top six (6) questions for the southeast were identical to the top six (6) for the total population. The seventh (7) ranked item on the southeast was question eight (8), not number (14). Number 8 is "I like to go to the library." The seventh top ranked item for the total population, number (14) was ranked number (9) in the Southeast.

Implications

This pilot has developed baseline data and a working research team for the continuation of a three-year, privately funded project sponsored by the Sex Differences in Reading (SDIR) special interest group of the International Reading Association. The goal of this project A.R.I.S.E. is to increase the effectiveness of students during the critical, "last-chance" (before dropping out of school) adolescent years.

It is hypothesized that students who, in ever-increasing numbers at this age, don't or won't read may still be taught to think and reason when given the opportunities to hear and discuss well written contemporary and classical adolescent literature. It

has also been hypothesized that these experiences will not only increase student interest, but also enhance their confidence in their abilities to receive incoming information (listening and reading), to use effective thinking and reasoning skills, and to process that information for output in either oral or written form (speaking and writing).

As the project continues, teaching variables will be addressed and analyzed. Cognitive variables will also be considered in the analysis of the performance of students who can listen, read, think, speak and write more effectively.

Table 1

Distribution of Girls and Boys Across all Regions

Region	Girls	Boys	Total[a]
International	113	156	307
Mid-West	79	102	207
North East	287	247	557
South East	149	118	267
South West	128	175	335
All Regions	756	789	1,673

[a]Total includes those who did not mark "sex."

Table 2

Average Reading Reaction Index, Region by Girls/Boys

Region	Girls Ave RRI	Boys Ave RRI	Total Ave RRI	Total St Dev	Total Number
South West	3.50	3.37	3.41	0.46	335
International	3.54	3.36	3.44	0.38	307
South East	3.65	3.49	3.58	0.47	267
North East	3.71	3.53	3.62	0.43	557
Mid-West	3.79	3.61	3.69	0.46	207
All Regions	3.64	3.47	3.55	0.43	1,673

Table 3

Top Seven (7) Questions Showing a Positive Attitude towards Reading (RRI)

		Total Population		
		Girls	Boys	Total
		Ave RRI	Ave RRI	Ave RRI
No.	Question	n=756	n=798	n=1,673
3	I feel good when I'm reading	4.41	4.26	4.33
20	I feel that my reading skills help	4.22	4.14	4.17
6	I understand most of the words	4.09	4.11	4.09
10	I think reading is hard work	4.21	3.93	4.05
2	I can answer...questions after reading	4.00	4.03	4.00
16	I like to read books, magazines..	4.05	3.92	3.98
14	I read parts of magazines...each week	3.85	3.82	3.83

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HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT READING?

Instructions:

1. Write your name on the Scan-Tron Form #882
2. Use the Scan-Tron form #882 to record your reactions to the following statements.
3. It is very important that you be honest in your response
4. Do not write on this sheet!

Please react to statements 1 - 20 using the following scale:

A=Strongly Agree B=Agree C=Disagree D=Strongly Disagree E=Not Sure

1. I like to read in my free time at school.
2. I can answer most of the skills questions after reading an assignment.
3. I feel good when I'm reading what interests me.
4. When I've seen a sports program on T.V., I like to read about it later.
5. I would rather look at diagrams and pictures in a book than read it.
6. I understand most of the words in my textbooks at school.
7. Most of the books I start to read for enjoyment are too long to finish.
8. I like to go to the library.
9. I enjoy reading in my free time at home.
10. I think reading is hard work.
11. I would rather ask directions than read a map.
12. Most of the books I choose to read are boring.
13. I think that adventures in a book are just as exciting as those on T.V.
14. I read parts of magazines, books or newspapers each week.
15. I wish I had more books at home to read.
16. I like to read books, magazines, and newspapers to find out things.
17. I would rather call directory assistance than look up a number in the telephone book.
18. I like to talk with others about the things I read.
19. I like to read about people I've seen on T.V.
20. I feel that my reading skills help me in everyday life, such as understanding signs, labels, and ads.

21-50. Leave Blank:

THANK YOU !

Survey design, and data analysis by System Consultant Services, Fresno, California.